

Dylan Angell // John Candy's Funeral (A Public Mourning)

John Candy's Funeral. *Dark, Dear Heart*. 18. Mar/1994. 8:02 P.M. [Youtube.]

*Why in the darkness do I see so clearly/
we are not going away.*

A pixelated frame of a hockey game turns to static, static turns to Mary Margaret O'Hara in a church, standing in front of a microphone.

I come here to grieve. Appalachia, underwater. Roads have risen, houses taken by mudslides, histories upended. *A waterline cuts halfway across a mirror, a living room caked with earth. Candles are lit, wilderness echoes, generators hum.*

Dark, Dear Heart.

The curtains are as red as Mary Margaret O'Hara's lipstick. Her hand falls again and again but always returns to the microphone. How many times have I watched this 1:02 minute video of O'Hara singing at John Candy's funeral?

Recorded from a VCR, O'Hara's voice distorts the technology, the tape too fragile to hold what she is giving. At times her body falls back, as if she might disappear, as if she too is overwhelmed by what she has given. She closes her eyes. As the song is carried to the pews, she all but steps aside.

I dream of mine, not lost in sleep, I'll call you down.

In the moments between phrases, it feels as if her own mourning has cut in—she is no longer able to hide in song. During the last few seconds of the video, she appears as if she might break, only to turn from the camera and towards the altar. She appears to be laughing.

The camera cuts away.



Goodbye to that which has laid my body still.

I wrote this line in reference to my own body—having fought my way through a temporary illness. Upon looking at the page later in the week, I can see that

the line was not for me, but for my grandmother. I had seen her only days before, moments after she had passed.

On the day of her memorial, I hung a white buttoned shirt on my bathroom door to keep it in range of shower steam. I have never been one to smooth wrinkles, but memorials require clothing that appears untouched.

There is no dishonesty or compromise here. Ritual has rendered us all clean.

In the pews, I stand in tiers of a genetic constellation: I am a grandson saying goodbye, a restless brother, a nephew seen once a decade. Once we settle, our voices rise to a song that none can follow. The organ is unable to draw melody from our throats. We are bonded in blood but not in harmony.

*And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own, and
the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.*

For decades, my grandmother tended to her garden. After the final *amen*, we step beyond the white walls to stand amongst the flowers that she had planted.

She had learned to paint watercolors in Japan. Some painters of landscapes never contribute to the growth or beauty of land, most only document. My grandmother had stopped painting to tend to her garden and family.

Only once her body had slowed did she decide to paint again.

*I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on roses and the voice I hear
falling on my ear, the son of God discloses.*

Amongst her scattered boxes, I found a photo.



The photo reminded me of a [video](#), filmed in the same era.

My head is shaved.

I stand in front of a mic and I am surrounded by eight musicians, half of whom aren't touching their instruments but smoking. I'm 23, I am thin, my clothes loose and wide, my *Goodwill Era*—likely donations made by the widow of a

deadman—my shoes wide with velcro. Benjamin Smoke said *if you can't find the key then you better take a rock and bust the lock.*

I didn't know how to do anything then, let alone sing, but I was patient. I only wanted to conjure a moment. Looking at the photo, I can smell the smoke that lingered in every bar at the beginning of this century. I can hear the crescendo of a cello and violin above the sustained distortion of guitars.

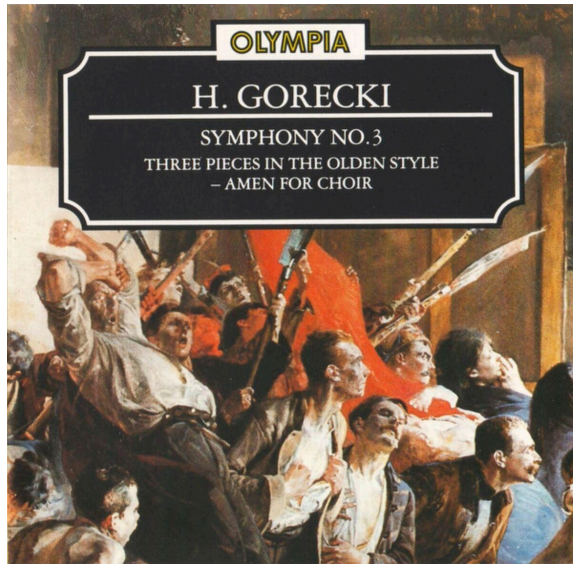
My voice, often off key and out of sync, caused confusion but was usually met with acceptance. I am visibly timid, this—an *exposure therapy* of sorts, to work through what I could not control.

Creating chaos to confront chaos.

Oh, sing for him/God's little song-birds

Górecki's *Symphony No 3* plays—a cold wind, invited in after a muddy morning's run, brings dead leaves into my living room.

I have not been sleeping. The world is failing Gaza, pain is ever present.



Lately, I've felt tethered to reality in such a way that I am less susceptible to slip towards dream or to be taken by song. In my mind's center—a camera obscura—a carousel of images, children crying out from cities of wreckage and debris.

When I run, I gain a clarity that keeps my mind open. I am able to meet my pulse as it rises, but the heart can only take so much. *Symphony No 3* begins with a rumble but the high strings soon swoop to lift the wavering drone, clearing the way for voice. The lyrics are from a prayer that had been found scratched upon a Gestapo prison wall—

Oh mamma, do not cry, no, immaculate queen of heaven, support me always.

Helena Błażusiakówna (the prayer's author) was on a train, transported by Nazis, when the rails were overtaken by resistance fighters. By evening she was back with her family.

Her words now rise in my living room.

*Abandon your notions of the past, without attributing a temporal sequence!
Cut off your mental associations regarding the future, without anticipation!*

A woman attacked—the footage repeats via instant replay, the violence multiplies. With each repeat the truth seems to dissolve, the more it is seen as video, the more it is seen as *video*—

We are often told which deaths deserve a public mourning. Some videos are revisited, while others are repeated for us. I remember returning to a diner through the final months of 2001, the television seemed to only repeat the falling of the towers.

The dead had died and now we the living were in the bardo—stalled on the River Styx.

Liberation is easy. Should you ask why this is so—it is because once the awesome, terrifying and fearful appearances arise, the awareness does not have the luxury of distraction.

The illusion of safety as a massacre is performed beyond the eye's periphery.

The thinness of narrative, the lie of a lens that sees all but what it should—our sense of reality shaped by untold histories.

The voice within the microphone sounds buried. The crowd repeats what is said: turning, carrying, reverberating the voice into a choir. We gather as a collective breath for a public mourning. Hundreds of thousands repeat—*stop the killing, end this genocide*.

I see children on shoulders holding pictures of children who have been killed. I imagine one child that I see as a photographed casualty, having stepped forth to stand amongst us, to petition against those who caused her death. From within the crowd comes a singing, the current becomes still as hundreds begin their evening prayer, each taking a knee to concrete. The singing is rough and wavery/strong and commanding. It is echoed, as snipers stand on rooftops and soldiers stand poised upon the White House lawn. With eyes closed, the worshippers pray, not for the cameras or politicians or for the soldier's gaze but for a moment to be without them, and together, in silence and solidarity.

The effects of bad government

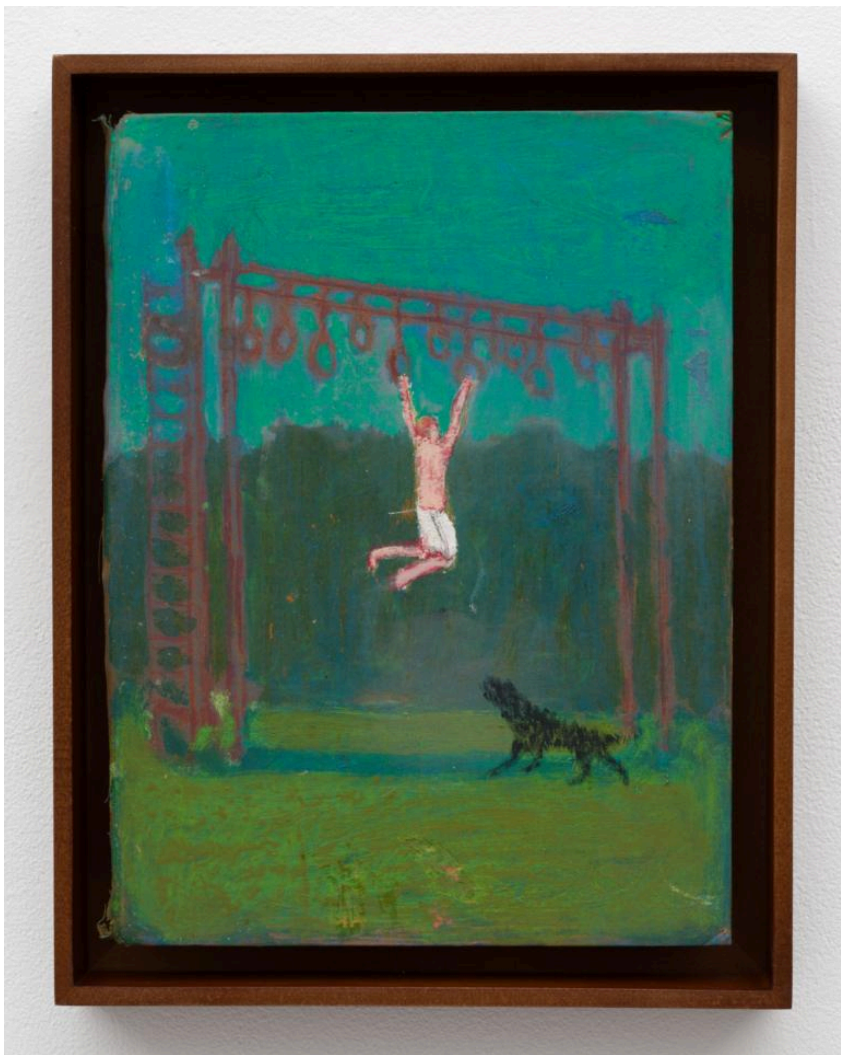
I often listen to recordings of painters talking about their work. Today, I was [soundtracked](#) by a Scottish gentleman who spoke of painting with the blood of an ox. I had not yet seen the artist's work but I imagined a white canvas marked

with an uneven red and brown splash of a chalk and milk consistency. Once the image of the canvas entered my mind I realized that it was quite similar to the images that were already occupying my mind—I have seen many photos of blood in recent months.

The artist seemed gentle. He had grown up in a small industrial town and he used painting techniques that were no longer commonly practiced. He spoke of using a gold pigment made from leaves that were once used to paint icons during the Byzantine era. He spoke of how when painters once needed a color that they had to find it in nature and often this meant sourcing the color from the very thing that was being painted: blood looked the most like blood, dirt the most like dirt, grass the most like grass.

I felt an urge to stop and press my hand to the ground.

The artist spoke with such empathy for nature, as if whatever he made was only a pale imitation to what the natural world had already shown him. As these days continue to bring images of death and destruction, I think about the artist, because while we might try, we can never replicate what has been lost.



The effects of bad government, by Andrew Cranston, 2024. Oil on hardback book cover, $11 \frac{1}{4} \times 8 \frac{1}{2}$ in. (28.50 × 21.70 cm); $13 \frac{3}{4} \times 10$ in. (34.92 × 25.40 cm) framed